

FEATURE

UNLOCKING THE GEN Y GUEST POTENTIAL

by Chris McBeath



As the tidal wave of Baby Boomers heads towards retirement, it is their offspring, the Gen-Yers, 34 years old and younger, who are now turning social mores inside out. Already comprising one third of all hotel guests, this youthful populace represents a tsunami of change.

Everything about the Gen-Yer is about instant gratification, WOW factor, the quality of personalized experience, and the integrity of a company's core values. Understand this concept and at least you're in the game of unlocking the Gen Y potential.

Instant Connectivity

According to the research company, Media Monitors, 86% of Gen-Yers are online at some point during the day, catching up on the latest news from their favourite news sources, sharing social networks, and reading emails.

The first generation to grow up with Mickey Mouse and a computer mouse each holding sway, a virtual world of information has always been at their fingertips. Social networks, global access, and hyper-connectivity are integral to their lifestyle, and they access them all with astonishing dexterity to learn, inform, effect change, and influence peers at lightning speed - often in less than 140 characters. This is the most impatient, advertising-skeptical, buyer-aware public we've ever known, and it has left most industries, including the hospitality sector, scrambling to keep up. Get it right, however, and strategically integrate Gen Y's dependence on technology, and a company can win their loyalty and that of their 500 friends on Facebook.

Future Shock

With an eye on the horizon, Westcorp Properties was among the earlier hotel operators to start targeting this young, on-the-go consumer.

According to the research company Media Monitors, 86% of Gen-Yers are online at some point during the day, catching up on the latest news from their favourite news sources, sharing social networks, and reading emails.

Both its Metterra Hotel, which opened in 2005, and the Matrix Hotel that followed two years later, are geared to Gen Y preferences. Each is centrally located in Edmonton with easy access to social, cultural, and healthy options for recreation and business, and both provide guestrooms that are fully equipped with technology such as HDTV, iPod docking stations, modern coffee brewers, cordless phones, and most importantly, FREE WiFi.

"Attracting Gen-Yers isn't only about location and physical amenities, it's about how personal you can make the experience," says Jane Jess, who is the regional director of sales and marketing. "Marketing into their social media frameworks has become an essential component to the sales matrix. This consumer is internationally aware; they know they have a voice, and because they really want to make a difference, it's equally important to be a company that echoes these values and demonstrates social responsibility."

In his book, *High-Tech, High-Touch Customer Service*, Micah Solomon comes across as a 21st Century upgrade of Tom Peters, reframing traditional customer service tenets to cater to this new breed of guest. His chapters on social media provide the most food for thought for anyone wishing to connect with the Gen Y demographic.

LOCK IN
Guest Satisfaction

WHY RFID?

- Keycards Don't Demagnetize
- Battery Audit Card
- Easy Lock Audit Via Keycard
- Staff Monitoring (Keycard Audits)
- Low Maintenance (Concealed Reader)

SAFLOK™ QUANTUM™ RFID

ILCO 790 RFID

KABA

ILCO
A Member of the Kaba Group

Saflok
A Member of the Kaba Group

© Kaba 2012, all rights reserved. Patents pending and protected.

514.735.5410 ext 706
 robert.sydor@kaba.com
 www.kabalodging.com
 www.ilcostore.com
 www.saflokstore.com

W.E. GREER LTD.
"OUR REPUTATION IS SPOTLESS"

Spectrum 12P/15P

With superior dirt pickup and filtration, Nilfisk-Advance's Spectrum vacuums are ideally suited to the hospitality industry. Best of all, it has a budget-friendly price tag!

AHLA special: Mention that you have seen this ad, and receive our special price! Call 1-800-565-9898 today for more details.

12P - \$430.92
329060107020

15P - \$486.79
329060307020

prices valid until August 31st, 2012

Advance
by Nilfisk-Advance

CLEANING CHEMICALS, EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES SINCE 1923

Solomon identifies how Gen Y has grown up to expect *anticipatory* technological behaviour and *aggregated* information - *instantly* - and then layers in examples of a hotel's new competitive environment.

Solomon writes, "With a few thumb strokes, they can have the information they need served up for them concierge style, based on their IP address or satellite location and other useful clues. Then consider Hipmuck, which lists travel options along with warnings about long lay-overs and other agonies, and shows hotels with precise proximity to your actual destination. And Gogobot where your own Facebook/Twitter pals have already rated potential trips for you. And of course TripAdvisor, with its user-generated ratings of nearly everything in the world of travel."

From a hotelier's perspective, the reality of this landscape can feel as far removed from high touch as you can get. Ironically, though, Gen-Yers are all about experiences that are less predictable, hotels that are less traditional, and high tech amenities that provide choice.

Fast Changing Realities

This youth-prevailing attitude is driving hotel design, guest services, booking methods, and marketing at such a rapid pace that harnessing the psyche of Gen Y has become a specialty.

In design, look for guestroom layouts where beds face oversized windows; large, flat screen TVs within one-stop connectivity entertainment centres for multiple electronic gadgetry such as PDAs, cell phones, mp3 players and laptops - where guests can watch a movie from their iPad or work on a PowerPoint presentation. Elsewhere, in-the-vibe elements include ever-busier lobbies with conversational, entertainment, and lounge areas alongside a range of self-serve options such as check-in kiosks (no more chest-high counters) as well as hotel apps that sell in-hotel services from spa to food and beverage specials. That same app can even enable Groupon-style, spur-of-the-moment offers to in-house guests.

The Burrard Hotel, Vancouver, has been on the fast track ever since it launched its "shabby done chic" Gen Y brand in the summer of 2011. In spite of the physical limitations of an older building, the hotel's central location and Gen Y specific amenities have created a hot value commodity in Twittersphere.

"Gen Yers are looking more for a unique destination, and an exciting, central location which they can explore, so the fact that we don't have a restaurant is of no consequence to them," explains Dani Pretto, its general manager. "We do, however, offer as many in-room free services as possible. These include WiFi, an espresso machine, branded bottled water, HDTV, movie and sports channels (Gen Y does not "do" Pay for View) and 100% bio-degradable, branded bathroom amenities."

In terms of reaching these guests, The Burrard has created an edgier website, revamped its social media platforms (Blog, Facebook, Twitter and Foursquare), and invested in a separate mobile site so that browsing and booking a room is on-the-go easy. "We've had guests making a reservation as they're walking through the door," Pretto admits. "But it demonstrates how fast this medium works; lead times are very, very short."

Keeping up with the pace is an art unto itself. Like many hoteliers, Pretto is adding a social marketing specialist to her staff. Operationally, she is pursuing smart check-in services and is working with a provider to have tablets placed in every room. "Although the pads are equipped with GPS trackers in case of loss or theft, we prefer to contract this service rather than take on the financial risk ourselves."

iPad Concierge

The Opus Hotels are joining the ranks of several leading chains in providing guests with tablets, placing customized v2 iPads in every guestroom. Each

Colliers
INTERNATIONAL

Colliers International is Canada's largest commercial real estate service provider. Our Alberta-based professionals can assist you with:

- > Hotel Sales Brokerage - Purchasing or Selling
- > Hotel Appraisal and Consulting Services

For more information please contact:

Perry Gereluk, B.Comm., AACI, MRICS, LEED AP
+1 780 969 2979
perry.gereluk@colliers.com

Colliers International
3555 Marulife Place, 10180 - 101 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 3S4
Main +1 780 420 1585
www.colliers.com

Accelerating success.

gadget is loaded with favourite apps and weblinks that reflect the personality of one of the hotel's five virtual Lifestyle Concierges, pointing out their favorite places to shop, dine, exercise, relax, and spa. Every iPad 2 boasts GPS and mobile technology, encouraging guests to wander through Vancouver accompanied by their virtual lifestyle concierge. As new and different options become available, each virtual concierge suggestion will be updated, keeping content fresh and relevant.

This move to self-service is very much part of the self-empowered Gen Y profile. Several third-party software developers are now on the scene, geared to helping hotels and airlines digitize their concierge services in a myriad of platforms - be they iPhone, BlackBerry or Android systems. The result is high tech touch: hotels are introducing apps to browse hotel amenities and local attractions, order theatre tickets, request wake-up calls, schedule housekeeping, message other guests, and arrange car service. In some instances, the app direct-connect to the kitchen has seen room service orders climb almost 20%.

Community Updates

Most hotels are still exploring this brave new world, and while they wait for their chain affiliation to roll out branded programs, individual properties such as The Westin Calgary have their bases covered.

"I make sure that pictures, tweets and videos keep our Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms current and fresh," says Andrea Wenz, its executive marketing assistant, who spends up to an hour a day managing the hotel's social media networks. "We use QR codes on all printed materials, and promote the Westin Superfood Menu items, which Gen-Yers really appreciate."

For all the exploding influence of online communities, there are those who still opt for "old-fashioned" hospitality. "Some of the things we've been doing to attract Gen Y customers is to not try and attract them," explains Darren VanMackelbergh, manager of Brewster Mountain Lodge in Banff. "We have decent green initiatives that have appeal as well as free wireless, and a complimentary breakfast, but by in large we trust that the destination and services will meet their need for an experience. Although we tend to cater to the older crowd, we always make sure we have ample inventory for flash sales on discounted booking engines, and we keep our social media pages updated with specific information. If some Gen Y get caught in our nets, then hopefully they will spread the word."

In today's vernacular, that hope translates as Tweeting, Blipping, Blogging, Bookmarking, Facebooking, Flickring, Linking-in, Yammering, and Yelping! And if any of these terms is not on your agenda, watch out. You're about to be bypassed! ☞

Ideas at Work

>>> When it renovated its 28 suites, Toronto's Windsor Arms Hotel, Toronto, added musical instruments, baby grand pianos, acoustic guitars, and harps into the mix, all of which are playable. It also introduced comprehensive vegan menus to its regular F&B offerings, including room service.

>>> In its 360° Package, several Luxe Hotels in Los Angeles, offer elements specifically for the Gen Y market such as the use of an iPad 2 for the duration of a guest's stay, a personal Town Car to get them to/from the airport, a luxurious room upgrade and a complimentary bottle of Shiraz wine.

>>> The Phoenician in Scottsdale, Arizona sells a "Dinner on the 9th Green" package through its app as well as spa specials at specific time slots that otherwise would go unbooked.

>>> The recently opened Inn at the 5th, Eugene, Oregon, has no check-in lines. Hotel staff carrying iPads greet and deftly guide guests through the check-in process, customizing requests for preferred in-room mini bar stock, breakfast delivery, and spa and restaurant reservations, all in one seamless experience.

>>> MGM's new program, M Life, has taken loyalty programs to the next level by tracking guest preferences to create individualized rewards. For example, if someone attends a Madonna concert, they may receive an offer to Lady Gaga, or the company may send you an entertainment coupon, rather than the traditional gambling offer.

>>> Instead of traditional food groups like appetizer and entrée, Marriott's 5-10-20 menu is organized by whether the food takes five, ten, or twenty minutes to prepare. This smart move speaks directly to on-the-go business travellers and lunch-breakers, and eliminates the server's automatic (and not always accurate) "Oh, everything's pretty quick!"



MICROFRIDGE® WITH SAFE PLUG®
THE LEADER
IN SMALL SPACE SOLUTIONS
FOR OVER 20 YEARS
IS NOW AVAILABLE IN CANADA

MICROFRIDGE SAFE PLUG **Danby**

MicroFridge® and Safe Plug® are registered trademarks of Intron Corporation ©Intron Corporation 2012, a subsidiary of Danby Products Inc.

THIS IS NO ORDINARY REFRIGERATOR.
Only MicroFridge® with Safe Plug® offers:

- **SAFE PLUG® TECHNOLOGY:** A patent-pending power management system that conserves energy and prevents circuit overloads
- **DUAL CHARGING STATION:** Your guests can safely and conveniently power up cell phones, laptops and other electronic devices
- **10-YEAR WARRANTY:** Our on-site service only adds to what is by far an industry best warranty
-  **ENERGY EFFICIENT:** Conserve energy, save utilities, and protect the environment
- **FIELD REVERSIBLE DOOR:** For maximum versatility
- **DETACHABLE MICROWAVE:** For custom installation
- **CUL LISTED**
- **EASY-TO-READ AND OPERATE MICROWAVES:** in English or French

For more information, call **(800) 637-7567**
or visit **www.microfridge.ca/hotelier**